

EQIP: The Bottom Line for Profits and Pastures

The Forgues Farm in Northern Vermont once just barely eked out a living for Travis and Amy Forgues and their growing family. Like other dairy farmers, their traditional confinement system, based on corn silage and alfalfa kept their operation going but without much left over. As milk prices fell the Forgues went deeper into debt. For over 17 years, they had struggled with their traditional dairy enterprise and then finally, had had enough. After learning from the Vermont Pasture Management Outreach Program how to maximize production and profits by raising their animals on pasture they took the plunge and went organic. Shifting from confinement to grazing had great results and their profits along with their quality of life significantly improved. After a few successful years of managed grazing they became organic certified.

A 200 acre pasture is now home to 90 milkers that reside there year round. The cows rotate through subdivided paddocks twice a day. After grazing for seven or eight months the cows are fed hay that is grown and baled on the farm. The switch from conventional to organic is complete. They are now committed to organic dairying and a whole new farming philosophy.



Henry Forgues looks out over newly seeded plantings completed under EQIP.

Practicing this new farming philosophy freed up the Forgues time and energies to address other resource issues on their farm. EQIP cost-share funds have allowed them to make several environmental improvements. A Prescribed grazing management system was improved with 13,200' of additional fencing, animal walkways and stream crossing to keep cows out of streams. A pest management plan helps improve herd health and forage quality for their organic outfit and a comprehensive nutrient management plan helps reduce pollutants. Reduced tillage, soil biological monitoring, composting and other sustainable strategies enhance and improve the forage crops.

So committed to their new organic operation the Forgues belong to a cooperative speakers' bureau and have successfully converted other farmers to this new way of doing business. They have even provided testimony to the Vermont House and Senate Agriculture committees that organic farming can be a lifeline for Vermont farmers. And if that isn't enough, their own dairy cows provide plenty of evidence that organic is the way to go as they frolic in un-grazed pastures throughout the year, free from stalls and walls that would normally have kept them confined.

